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3 men confess to attacking Lebanon journalist



Lebanese police in Beirut, Lebanon on 8 May 2017 [Ratib Al Safadi/Anadolu Agency]

February 21, 2020 at 1:28 pm

Three bodyguards of former minister Marwan Kheireddine yesterday confessed to the **premeditated attack** on financial journalist Mohammad Zbeeb.

The attack took place in a car park in the Beirut district of Hamra on 12 February as Zbeeb was

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Initially thought to have been perpetrated by Lebanese police, three of Kheireddine's bodyguards confessed during questioning with the Internal Security Forces (ISF).

According to local news channel *Al-Akhbar*, one of the three men admitted to planning the attack because Zbeeb "is always attacking the boss". Adding that Kheireddine, who is the chairman of Al-Mawrid Bank, had no link to the attack.

Investigators are still seeking to establish whether anyone else was with the men at the time of the incident or if had incited them to assault Zbeeb, *the Daily Star Lebanon* reported.

Bank Chairman Kheireddine said via Twitter, that he handed over the perpetrators to the ISF as soon as he heard about the incident. Adding that believing in the judiciary is the only way to achieve justice.

Lebanese people, in response, took to Twitter, to denounce Kheireddine, with several pictures of the bank chairman with carcasses of lions, leopards and other wildlife, from trophy hunting.

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Several journalists have faced arbitrary detention and beating at the hands of security forces while covering nationwide **anti-government protests** since October 2019. American Journalist Nicholas Frakes was **detained for three days** in January after Lebanese security forces believed he was live streaming the protests for Israeli news site *Haaretz*.

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The Alternative Union for Journalists in Lebanon called the attack on Zbeeb "cowardly" and condemned it as "assault on all journalists and the revolution, and a crime against freedoms".

The assault sparked over 1,000 protesters to attend a solidarity sit-in in front of the Central Bank in Hamra the following day, under the slogan "Journalism is not a scapegoat".

In response, the Minister of Justice Marie-Claude Najm, said via Twitter that the attack on Zbeeb "demonstrates a dangerous trend to intimidate and scare the media, especially those with dissenting voices", and promised to follow up on investigations into the incident.

Zbeeb is known for critical financial writing and resigned his position as editor-in-chief of *Al-Akhbar* over concerns that the outlet failed to report objectively on protests which swept across the country in October 2019.

The financial journalist took to Twitter to condemn the attack, writing "we're not afraid and we won't hide, we will squish the oligarchy".

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